

Korean War Veterans Memorial

Washington, D.C.
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



A War Half a World Away



National Archives

Only five years had passed since the end of World War II when the United States once again found itself embroiled in a major international conflict. In the early morning hours of June 25, 1950, the communist government of North Korea launched an attack into South Korea. Determined to support the world's imperiled democracies, the United States immediately sent troops from Japan to join those already stationed in Korea; they fought with other nations under the U.N. flag. What was envisioned as a short, decisive campaign became a prolonged, bitter, frustrating fight that threatened to explode beyond Korean borders. For three years the fighting raged. In

1953 an uneasy peace returned by means of a negotiated settlement that established a new boundary near the original one at the 38th parallel.

One-and-a-half million American men and women, a true cross-section of the Nation's populace, struggled side by side during the conflict. They served as soldiers, chaplains, nurses, clerks, and in a host of other combat and support roles. Many risked their lives in extraordinary acts of heroism. Of these, 131 received the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Nation's most esteemed tribute for combat bravery.

A Place for Reflection

Viewed from above, the memorial is a circle intersected by a triangle (see below). Visitors approaching the memorial come first to the triangular Field of Service. Here, a group of 19 stainless-steel statues, created by World War II veteran Frank Gaylord, depicts a squad on patrol and evokes the experience of American ground troops in Korea. Strips of granite and scrubby juniper bushes suggest the rugged Korean terrain, while windblown ponchos recall the harsh weather. This symbolic patrol brings together members of the U.S. Air Force, Army, Marines, and Navy; the men portrayed are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

A granite curb on the north side of the statues lists the 22 countries of the United Nations that sent troops or

gave medical support in defense of South Korea. On the south side is a black granite wall. Its polished surface mirrors the statues, intermingling the reflected images with the faces etched into the granite. The etched mural is based on actual photographs of unidentified American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. The faces represent all those who provided support for the ground troops. Together these images reflect the determination of U.S. forces and the countless ways in which Americans answered their country's call to duty.

The adjacent Pool of Remembrance, encircled by a grove of trees, provides a quiet setting. Numbers of those killed, wounded, missing in action, and held prisoner-of-war are etched in



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stone nearby. Opposite this counting of the war's toll, another granite wall bears a message inlaid in silver: Freedom Is Not Free.